NEWS LESSON

Could a New Bird Really Count as a Dodo?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Which extinct animal would you most like to see alive?
2. Would you visit a place to see an animal created by scientists?
3. What makes an animal worth protecting?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**shorthand**	☐	A	connected with ideas rather than practical details
2	**genome**	☐	B	the chance that something will happen
3	**conceptual**	☐	C	not exciting or attractive
4	**advocates**	☐	D	very impressive and dramatic
5	**unglamorous**	☐	E	the act of returning something to its earlier condition
6	**prospect**	☐	F	a quick way of referring to something bigger
7	**restoration**	☐	G	the full set of genetic instructions of a living thing
8	**spectacular**	☐	H	people who publicly support an idea or plan

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A start-up claims progress towards resurrecting the dodo, while independent scientists question what that would achieve. Is de-extinction science or spectacle?

1 The dodo is the bird everyone knows is gone. A large, flightless species that vanished from Mauritius in the seventeenth century, it has become shorthand for extinction. In October 2026, the US-based Colossal Biosciences announced further progress towards engineering a bird with some of the dodo's defining characteristics. The ambition is striking. What success would actually mean is much less clear.

2 Colossal says it has reconstructed about 95% of the extinct bird's genome, the full set of its genetic instructions, and developed an AI-assisted system to identify the genetic changes linked to features such as the unusual shape of its head and beak. Its proposed route involves introducing selected changes into a living relative, the Nicobar pigeon, and addressing the formidable reproductive challenges involved in producing genetically modified birds. These are genuine areas of technical research, but no recreated dodo has emerged, and the distance between identifying promising genetic targets and producing a viable animal remains considerable. Nor is that a gap which funding and publicity alone will bridge.

3 The deeper difficulty is conceptual. Scientists may be able to piece together a genetic approximation of the bird, but a species is not simply a list of instructions waiting to be reassembled. Genes interact with development, behaviour, environment and the experience of generations. A bird engineered to resemble the dodo might share some physical characteristics with its extinct ancestor without reproducing its full biology or ecological role.

4 For this reason, a number of evolutionary biologists argue that 'de-extinction' is a misleading description. A proxy species, however remarkable, should not be confused with the recovery of an organism that has genuinely vanished.

5 There is also a practical question about what such a bird would do once created. Mauritius has changed profoundly since the dodo's disappearance. Introduced predators, habitat destruction and other human influences helped drive the original species towards extinction. Releasing a dodo-like bird without grappling with those pressures would make little ecological sense.

6 Colossal says it is collaborating with Mauritian partners on habitat preparation, a reminder that restoration depends as much on ordinary conservation work as on sophisticated genetics. Habitat preparation is slow, unglamorous work, and it would have to succeed before any engineered bird could be released with any prospect of surviving.

7 Advocates see wider benefits in the research. Methods developed for gene editing, reproduction and the preservation of genetic diversity might eventually help threatened species. Critics counter that spectacular resurrection projects attract disproportionate attention and resources while existing wildlife faces immediate and measurable dangers. Both arguments have merit, although the potential benefits of experimental biotechnology should not be mistaken for benefits already demonstrated in conservation programmes.

8 For now, the dodo belongs to history rather than to the forests of Mauritius. The company has advanced aspects of a research programme; it has not done away with extinction. Perhaps the most useful contribution of such ambitious science will be to sharpen rather than dissolve the distinction between restoration and imitation. A convincing likeness could be a remarkable scientific achievement. Whether it would repair the ecological loss that made the dodo famous is an altogether more demanding question.

Sources: Reuters. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The article suggests that identifying genes linked to the dodo's beak is easier than producing a viable bird. T F NG
2. The writer thinks funding and publicity would be enough to close the gap between genetic research and a viable bird. T F NG
3. The writer accepts that both supporters and critics of the project have a reasonable point. T F NG
4. Mauritius has agreed to release any engineered bird into the wild. T F NG
5. The writer treats a convincing likeness of the dodo as scientifically worthless. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

approximation	bridge	dissolve	formidable	merit	pervasive	proxy	tenuous

1. Persuading regulators to approve the release would be a _____ task, given how cautious they are.
2. The model offers only a rough _____ of how the ecosystem really behaves.
3. I disagree with the conclusion, but I admit the argument has some _____ .
4. Once the cost was explained, the initial enthusiasm began to _____ .
5. It will take more than donations to _____ the gap between the plans and the practice.
6. Rising sales are sometimes used as a _____ for consumer confidence.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Mauritius has changed profoundly since the dodo's _____ . (APPEAR)
2. The _____ of extinction is what makes every loss so serious. (REVERSE)
3. A bird engineered to resemble it might not reproduce its _____ role. (ECOLOGY)
4. The _____ of any release depends on controlling introduced predators. (SUSTAIN)
5. Spending _____ large sums on one famous species may leave others without help. (PROPORTION)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At C1, many collocations need one exact verb or adjective. We lay the groundwork, but we make progress.

dismantle	heated	lay	pave	sweeping	unforeseen	voiced

1. The pilot study helped _____ the groundwork for a much larger programme.
2. Several biologists have _____ doubts about whether a modified pigeon counts as a dodo.
3. The announcement has triggered a _____ debate among biologists.
4. Promoters of the technology sometimes make _____ claims about what it can achieve.
5. Releasing animals without proper planning can have _____ consequences for native wildlife.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would a bird that looked like a dodo count as bringing it back?
2. Would you spend more on protecting living species or recreating extinct ones?
3. Could the promise of bringing animals back make extinction seem less serious?

9 Role-play: where should the money go?

Work in pairs. Your wildlife charity has £50,000 to spend. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the colleague who wants to protect living birds

You want to spend the money on a nature reserve for birds in danger today. Explain why. Ask your partner what they would really get for the money.

Student B · the colleague who likes the new science

You want to give the money to research that tries to bring back a lost animal. Say why it could help. Listen to your partner's worries and try to agree a plan.

Useful phrases

I'd rather spend it on animals we can still save.

That's a fair point, but it's worth the risk.

What would we actually get for the money?

I don't think it's one or the other.

Could we split it between the two projects?

We're running out of time, so let's decide.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did the money go, and who gave way?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 G · 3 A · 4 H · 5 C · 6 B · 7 E · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 formidable · 2 approximation · 3 merit · 4 dissolve · 5 bridge · 6 proxy

6 Word forms

1 disappearance · 2 irreversibility · 3 ecological · 4 sustainability · 5 disproportionately

7 Language focus

1 lay · 2 voiced · 3 heated · 4 sweeping · 5 unforeseen

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